

SNAKE FARM IN TEXAS PRODUCES 20,000 ANNUALLY FOR MARKET

W. A. King and Wife Sell Rattlers at Good Price After Extracting Venom for Sale to Chemists—Reptiles Have White Meat, Which Tastes Like Veal—Women Like Industry.

(Brownsville (eTx.) Dispatch to New York World.)

Probably the largest "snake farm" in the world is operated here by W. A. King—"Snake" King, as he calls himself. The title is not inappropriate. He has a partner in the business in his wife. The two have handled many thousands of venomous reptiles.

Just now they are catching a great many, it being the breeding season. It is not unusual for a rattler to bring forth 50 or 60 in one litter. Not long ago one brought forth 183 in one litter. An infant snake is worth 25 cents, and it rapidly grows in value up to \$5 to \$10, depending upon its weight. Snakes are usually sold by the pound. King feeds his snakes field mice and rats brought in by Mexican boys.

King says he has handled more than 500,000 snakes since he started in the business, about twenty years ago. He is now shipping annually about 20,000 snakes from his farm. The chaparral wilderness of South Texas and all of Northern Mexico is the natural habitat for rattlers and many other kinds of poisonous reptiles.

Women Hunt Rattlers.

Mrs. King is an expert snake hunter. As a girl she learned to handle them with a minimum of danger. She found that there was a market for them, and for several years before meeting King she made a business of hunting the reptiles in the brush around Brownsville. She still delights in snake hunting, and is usually accompanied by a sister, who is an assistant at the farm. The hunting of rattlesnakes gives employment to more than 1,000 Mexicans in the spring of the year.

Snakes from the King farm are shipped all over the world. They are in demand by museums, side shows, zoological gardens, and for other exhibition purposes. Many of these snakes are also used for scientific purposes—for study and dissecting.

The Kings do quite a business in selling snake poison. It is used largely by chemists for experimental purposes and brings a good price. It is said to be valuable for medicinal purposes also. There is also much demand for rattlesnake oil, many believing that it is good for rheumatism and some other ills.

King and his wife have been bitten many times by rattlesnakes.

Snakes Taste Like Veal.

"The first time I was bitten by a rattlesnake was in 1897," he says. "I was sick at the stomach for some time, but I cut the wound and let the blood flow, using permanganate of potash, with a hypodermic injection of ammonia. Sometimes it is necessary to apply a tourniquet. As soon as the poison hits the flesh it seeps off, so the safest way is to cut a little cross—about half an inch—at the place bitten. Let the blood flow freely. If the solution is mixed properly and administered properly it is a sure cure, in my opinion."

"Yes, I have heard of eating snake meat, old settlers have told me they have had to eat it. The meat is white and fine, tasting like veal."

"If a snake is hit by a stick and wounded, it will try to poison itself. Rattlesnakes coil in a flash, but they do not have to be coiled in order to bite. They have to coil in order to jump, and they are very lively when they do move. If a rattler is moving it can swing around like a flash and strike, but if it has a chance to get away it will not trouble you. From a coil they can throw themselves two-thirds the length of their body, but by repeated jumps they can tire themselves out."

Little Snakes Most Deadly.

"The young snakes have poison fangs almost as soon as they are born, ready to do the work. The smaller the rattlesnake the deadlier it is. The reason the copperhead is so poisonous is because it is so small. The poison remains in a small wound, which quickly heals over, as there is no blood flowing. With a large snake the fangs are so big and the snake so heavy that if it strikes you it tears, the lower jaw hooking up and its weight causing it to drop. Such a wound bleeds. A little snake locks its jaws and hangs on."

King has several dogs trained for snake hunting. They are of the Mexican hairless variety. They quickly catch the scent of a snake and follow its trail until they reach its den or come upon it in the brush.

The usual method of capturing a snake is to throw a lasso of a small, stout twine over its head, choking it, and then dropping it into a gunnysack. Often a hunter will bring in a dozen or more snakes in one sack.

When the dogs trail a snake to a den it is necessary to dig the reptiles out, and not infrequently several other snakes are found in the same hole. Live in Big Swarms.

"Last April," King said, "I had dug

out a snake when I discovered another right behind me a male. The female was in the den. Mr. Snake reared up, and I jumped into a prickly pear patch, and none too quick. In the end I got both snakes. Sometimes you find 75 or 100 in one little patch."

"Mrs. King and her sister, when they caught the biggest rattlesnake I ever saw, had small boxes. The two went out by themselves and were carrying a gunnysack with one or two snakes they had caught earlier in the day. Mrs. King lassoed the big snake and tethered him to a tree and then set the box over him. This snake was 9 feet 6 1/2 inches long and had nineteen rattles. He was captured on the other side of the river below Matamoros."

"It is all nonsense to say snakes hypnotize people. I never heard of an authentic case."

"When a snake is located the next process is to pick it up. But you must not make a false move; it would be fatal. Circle it quietly. Here is where what they call 'snake charming' comes in. I don't believe there is such a thing, although they say that certain men can move and make a snake follow them. Of course, when a man moves around the snake its head does follow. When you have the snake quiet reach under the body and pick it up. It remains in its coil. You must know the exact portion of the body in order to lift it up; otherwise there is danger. I put my left hand down, causing him to raise his head. The body then is in the correct position for handling. If it is a 'mean' snake you should work long enough to get the strike out of it by tiring it. If you come on it suddenly it might go to rattling, but the popular belief that before a snake bites it rattles is a mistake. I have approached hundreds and hundreds of snakes that did not rattle. The big fellows haul off and bite and rattle afterward. Also there is no foundation to the story that the rattlesnake gets a new rattle every year. When it sheds its skin a new rattle comes. But I have known snakes to shed three and four times a year in damp years."

Poison Is Extracted.

F. B. Armstrong was the pioneer snake farmer in the Brownsville section. He made a business of extracting poison from rattlesnakes and making them harmless by cutting out their fangs and poison sacs.

A specially constructed box is used to hold the snake while the work of relieving it of its liquid poison and making it harmless is performed. On top of the box is a sliding lid, and in one end of the lid is a small aperture, just large enough to fit over the neck of the snake. The head is drawn out through the hole by means of a lasso and the lid tightened against the neck, rendering the snake powerless for harm. A glass is placed in the open mouth of the reptile, and it instantly brings down its jaws, throwing out in anger all the poison that the sac contains—usually from one to two tablespoonfuls.

The poison having been ejected, the operator cuts out the fangs, which lie down close to the jaws in the back part of the mouth, resembling hypodermic needles. Having removed the fangs, slit is made in the poison sac, and thereafter the snake can do no harm. The poison is of a greenish yellow tinge. While the process is going on the snake rattles continuously.

The business of capturing and marketing snakes is carried on extensively in some parts of Mexico also.

NO LAUGHING MATTER.

An American visiting in England encountered one afternoon in the hotel in London where he was stopping a Scottish kinsman, says the New York Evening Post. The Scot agreed to dine with the American, the cousin repaired to the grill, and after suitable preliminaries a steak was set before them. It was tough. The waiter was summoned. He was all apologies. Another steak would be forthcoming—or chops if the gentlemen preferred.

"Hold on," said the Scot, as his eye fell upon a dish of asparagus which supported the steak on one side. He carefully consulted the bill of fare. Asparagus was expensive just then. "I'll tell ye what we'll do, my man," he went on; "if ye'll no charge us for the asparagus we'll keep the steak."

The waiter seemed a bit startled, but accepted the compromise, and the American, who was paying the bill, concealed his amusement and allowed his guest's arrangement to stand. He even ate—sparingly—of the steak. A few days later he related the incident to another kinsman, also a Scot.

"It is what I should have done myself," said the other kinsman solemnly.

The Balkan war has brought about a rise in certain lumber prices in Europe because of the big demand for wood for ammunition boxes.

There is in the heart of woman such a deep well of love that no age can freeze it.

FIRE DANGERS IN RESORT HOTELS

Number of Fires and Amount of Losses in Five Years Reveal General Fire-Trap Conditions.

Now that the summer hotel season has opened facts and figures compiled recently by Safety Engineering, New York, will interest pleasure-seekers who may leave their homes for the resort hotel.

In five years, 1908-1912, 327 resort hotels burned, or more than 16 per cent of the number listed now as resort hotels. The aggregate loss was \$15,000,000; the average loss, \$45,000. Last year, 1912, the total loss, \$2,500,000, was a little above the yearly average. That was nearly 4 per cent of the resort hotel investment, and the number of fires, 76, was in similar proportion to the total number of hotels.

Rate, Time, and Place of Burning.

Every five days in 1912 marked the passing of a resort hotel. That average has been fairly constant for five years. The fires in 1912 were but a few less than in 1909, the record year of the five. If 1913 continues as it has begun, the record for this year may show a diminution in the number of fires. On the other hand it may be a "calm before the storm," as in the summer months numerous fires have been recorded each year—40 per cent of all fires occurred in the six "open months," April to September, and 25 per cent in June and July.

Through the time of year that fires occur most frequently is interesting, the time of day is more so. Nearly 70 per cent of the fires have happened in the hours between sunset and sunrise, and fully 50 per cent in the period of soundest sleep.

In what states have these fires occurred most frequently? New York is in the lead, with 23 per cent of all fires, or 1 per cent more than the percentage of five New England States. The six States are debited with nearly one-half of the resort hotel fires in the United States. And, further, the six States and nine States along the Atlantic Coast had 70 per cent of all the fires in five years.

Reasons For Burning.

What are the causes of the fires? The accompanying tables will answer that question.

The fires that have happened are fires that could have been avoided if reasonable precautions had been taken to prevent them, fires that would not have progressed beyond incipient stages had they been detected promptly by automatic fire alarm systems or by watchmen. Fires that might have been extinguished in incipient stages had necessary extinguishing apparatus been at hand. Fires that totally destroyed buildings because alarms to fire departments were delayed. Fires that burned unretarded because of lack of fire walls, partitions and fire doors and enclosures about stairways and elevators. Fires that spread rapidly through hollow walls and ceiling finish. Fires that could have been controlled had there been sufficient water and apparatus and organized private or public fire departments to use these means effectively. Fires that occurred during sleeping hours when escape was difficult and dangerous.

Rate Of Burning Will Continue Unless—

It is only a matter of time before other hotels of similar character will succumb to the ravages of fire unless the owners profit by the examples set by a few hotels and insure the permanency of their houses by investments in alterations of buildings and in fire fighting equipment.

Less than one-half of the amount of these are the things thought of usually first in selecting a resort hotel: Where is the hotel located? Is the "view" attractive? What are the sports, the recreations? What is the cuisine? Has the hotel indoor attractions? Are the guest chambers comfortable?

Questions About Safety That Every Person Should Ask.

The questions the average person does not think of asking, are:

Has everything been done to prevent a fire?

Can a fire be detected readily?

What is the method of alarming guests in case of fire?

Is there sufficient apparatus with which to fight a fire?

Are the employees of the house organized to act promptly and effectively in cases of emergency in directing the safe exit of guests and in the use of fire apparatus?

Is the hotel provided with a system for fighting fires outside the building?

Is the design and construction of the house such that a fire will be confined to the locality of origin and not spread unrestrained throughout an entire story because of lack of fire walls, partitions and fire doors, or from floor to floor because the elevators and stairways are not enclosed by fireproof materials and the openings in the enclosure covered with fire doors?

Is the wall and ceiling finish of the hotel of such a nature that fires may spread in its hollow courses so as to involve the entire building?

Attention To Safety To Life.

Attention to safety to life in a resort hotel is as highly necessary as it

is in a factory. Progressive states are concerned about the safety of the lives of factory workers. Whom does the safety of the lives of women and children crowded in resort hotels during the height of the season concern?

A merchant or a manufacturer will pack his family off for the vacation season to live under conditions of danger, conditions to which the laws of certain States would not permit him to subject those in his employ.

New resort hotels may be built to resist fire to a considerable degree. In fact, they should be for reasons other than safety—it is economical to build fireproof. Wood is not a sensible building material nor is the cost, as compared with incombustible materials, sufficiently low to be attractive nowadays. Owners of certain large hotels that have burned have not built to burn again, as many do; they have built enduring buildings of fireproof construction. That is a commendable policy, but it would have been far more commendable if the hotels that burned had been altered and equipped to resist burning.

Value Of Automatic Sprinklers.

The greatest single device for active fire resistance is the automatic sprinkler. Automatic sprinklers will do everything except prevent fire. A single sprinkler opened by a fire will operate an alarm. Thus three primary conditions of danger are eliminated: (1) The fire is prevented from spreading by being held in check or extinguished; (2) the detection is immediate; and (3) an alarm of fire is given to which the response will be prompt, if the hotel has a private fire brigade, and the water may be shut off as soon as the sprinkler has done its work and excessive water damage avoided.

Witness this testimony from one who has profited by automatic sprinkler protection, the owner of a Southern hotel, which was equipped with automatic sprinklers:

"ance, and of far more importance, is the absolute feeling of satisfaction caused by knowing that the building and contents cannot burn up. This we can safely assert for the reason that on October 30 last, a young lady threw an exploded lamp into one of our toilet rooms right in the middle of the building—an ideal place to test the efficiency of the sprinkler system—and in less than half a minute one sprinkler head blew off and poured a regular deluge of water on the fire, putting it out immediately, and in less than two minutes the valve on that floor had been closed and the drainage valve opened and the flow of water stopped, causing a total damage to walls of \$50, and in five minutes a new sprinkler head had been put on and the water turned back into the system. All this happened about 6 o'clock in the morning, when the hotel was full of guests, without any excitement among the guests or without any inconvenience to the guests."

Other Measures For Safety.

Here are other things that should be considered by resort hotel owners:

First, prevent fires by removing possible causes. Arrange to promptly detect a fire by installing automatic fire alarms or watchmen and clock. Equip with apparatus to fight a fire, chemical extinguishers, inside hose, etc. Provide a local system to alarm guests in case of fire. Insure safe and speedy egress from building by furnishing proper fire escapes. Arrange to transmit an alarm of fire to the house fire brigade from any part of house by auxiliary fire alarm boxes. Design and construction of buildings should be such that a fire will be confined to place of origin by incombustible partitions and doors which retard spread laterally and by enclosing elevators and stairways to prevent fire from passing from one floor to another. If doors or partitions cut off light, glaze them with wireglass. If the roof covering is combustible, i. e., wooden shingles, or tarpaper, replace it with incombustible roofing, i. e., approved composition, asbestos shingles or metal or tile.

REVOLT AGAINST "MERCHANT GERMAN"

Berlin, June 28.—The Association of Iron and Steel Industries of Berlin has decided, following a movement started in the German business world some time ago, to recommend to its members that, beginning October 1 next, they discard all unnecessary salutations and closing formulas in their correspondence, and also that redundant and superfluous phrases be dispensed with. The association's lead is likely to find many followers, especially in the Rhineland, where the revolt against what is called "merchant German" is widespread. As a sample of the phrases to be discarded the following may be cited:

"In the possession of your honored letter of yesterday, I acknowledge to you the receipt of the same thankfully, and have taken the most careful notice of its contents."

This is the stock formula for acknowledging a business letter. The reformers see no reason why "yours of yesterday received and contents noted" does not fill all requirements.